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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS FR 000076

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [UNESCO](#) [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [EG](#) [JO](#)  
SUBJECT: GAZA/JERUSALEM DOMINATE UNESCO EXECUTIVE BOARD INFORMATION  
MEETING

11. Summary: Middle East issues dominated the information session for Executive Board members held by UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura on January 16. Arab states repeatedly urged Matsuura to be more active in protecting educational and cultural facilities in Gaza. The latter undertook to put UNESCO personnel into a UN team that will soon travel to Gaza to assess the inhabitants' needs. He also agreed to hold - probably in February -- another information session for Executive Board members after UNESCO team members return to Paris. Member states also raised Jerusalem, inquiring what the Director-General planned to do to prevent another impasse over the Temple Mount's Mughrabi Gate from disturbing the next Executive Board. The Director-General said he was trying to encourage the parties (Israel, Jordan, and the Jerusalem "waqf") to reschedule an "encounter" among these parties that was cancelled last November just before it was scheduled to meet. End Summary.

GAZA TAKES CENTER STAGE

12. Gaza and Middle East issues dominated the Director-General's biannual Information Meeting, 16 January 2009. Executive Board Chairman Yai (Benin) set the tone by beginning the session with a moment of silence for "the victims of Gaza". Asked repeatedly what he is doing about the conflict, Director-General (DG) Matsuura told Member State delegates that he had spoken out five times since the fighting began, including issuing a statement of support regarding Qatar's Sheikha Mozah's proposal to have schools in Gaza declared as safety zones. The DG also promoted calls for dialogue as well as the necessary protection for both educational and media institutions.

13. The DG said that Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has accepted the idea of a United Nations interagency mission to assess the needs on the ground, which will be sent as soon as possible. Matsuura said that he has already expressed UNESCO's desire to participate in the mission, particularly in connection with evaluating how to get

educational institutions up and running, and determining the level of damage to any cultural sites.

¶4. Kuwait and Egypt spoke to urge a Gaza mission be undertaken at the earliest opportunity, with Egypt asking that the Director-General come up with some practical measures to take immediately, as it will take too much time for the mission report to be finalized. Several Arab speakers urged the Director General to convene an information meeting on the Gaza situation in early February. The DG thanked Kuwait for arranging a meeting for him with Arab ambassadors on the Gaza situation and agreed that he would hold another information meeting once he had some new information to report.

¶5. Cuba thanked both the DG and the Chairman for their comments on Gaza and said that it is not possible to "be on the margins" of what's happening in Gaza (noting bombings of UN buildings, mosques, schools). He suggested that the DG's public comments be more widely publicized to let the world know that UNESCO has expressed its concerns on this situation. He went on to say that the DG should personally take part in the United Nations mission to Gaza, adding that "we have to say 'Yes We Can!'"

¶6. The Portuguese ambassador asked the DG to take concrete steps, and suggested that the UNSYG's High Representative for the "Alliance of Civilizations Jorge Sampaio, be invited to brief members on the situation in Gaza. (Note: The Spanish and Turkish delegations later took the floor to second this idea. End note.) The DG said that he would be pleased to arrange for an information meeting with Sampaio at an appropriate time when there is something to say, but stressed he would not wait for the high representative before scheduling another information meeting on Gaza.

¶7. After Board members had ceased asking questions, Israeli Ambassador David Kornbluth, an observer, was given the floor. He said that if UNESCO is to play any role, it must be in fact-finding. He asked that the DG ensure that the role be balanced, and that it must take into account how the conflict began, adding that rockets had fallen on Israeli schools and communities. Kornbluth also mentioned that the "terrorists'" use of shielding (referring to the Hamas practice of using civilians and civilian property as shields) is a war crime. Kornbluth urged that any fact-finding by UNESCO be balanced, or warned that it will not help us move forward.

#### MUGHRABI GATE AND JERUSALEM

¶8. Many delegations also raised issues relating to Jerusalem. The French ambassador said that the World Heritage enhanced monitoring mechanism for the Mughrabi Gate is the embodiment of the kind of cooperation that can be achieved at UNESCO. At the same time, the ambassador asked the DG how he planned to avoid major disruptions on issues like Mughrabi Gate that occurred at the last Executive Board session

¶9. Matsuura said that the "technical encounter" between the Israelis and Jordanians was "postponed" in mid-November 2008, and that he is working to arrange another. (Note: The Director-General was being very diplomatic in suggesting he was responsible for the failure of the meeting. End note.)

¶10. The Spanish ambassador specifically asked that the DG convene a meeting concerning World Heritage in Jerusalem before the next Board, adding that we need to show that the World Heritage convention can help everyone achieve their goals.

¶11. Executive Board Chairman Yai declared that we must all work to ensure that this issue is not politicized excessively, and that we should do our best to begin negotiations far in advance of the Executive Board. He noted that a delegation from Israel would be visiting the Secretariat 27-29 January. (Note: Israel's A/S and DAS for IO Affairs will be visiting for the Holocaust Remembrance ceremonies. End note.)

¶12. Once again, the Israeli and Iranian delegations (both observers) were permitted to speak when member states had finished talking. Israeli Ambassador David Kornbluth urged the DG to be careful with the process, referring to the problems that occurred during the negotiation process during the last Executive Board. Kornbluth said that the process that we now use took years to arrive at, and that

we have proven that it works, as we have been able to arrive at consensus decisions. He noted that when the process is abandoned, as it was at the last Executive Board, negotiations collapsed. He asked that we recognize the process is fragile, and that we treat it with the respect that it deserves. Kornbluth also asked that the people involved arrive with clear positions early enough to allow for talks to begin before the Executive Board is underway.

¶13. Finally, Iran's delegate said that he supported the call for an information meeting. He said that the situation is a "real holocaust" and that "UNESCO must help put an end to this genocide and extermination".

¶14. Comment: UNESCO's next Executive Board session begins on April 14. It is likely to be dominated by Middle East issues, judging by the extraordinary number of questions on Gaza and Jerusalem at the Director-General's general information session January 16.

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